

25A
04 CIAH-01.2 *Air America*
CIA 5-03.1

BLUE BOOK

Approved For Release 2003/12/02 : CIA-RDP75-00001R000300130004-7

25X1

9A.

Incredible
story behind
the U.S.'s
deadliest
cold war
operation

*For \$25,000,
plus the burning
desire to beat
the Commies
at their own
bloody game,
these flying
commandos
will jockey
agents and
supplies
anywhere in
the world.*

AIR AMERICA- THE CIA'S SECRET AIR FORCE

by ED HYDE

FLAK from the ground burst around the twin-engine B-26. Blonde husky, six feet one inch Allen Lawrence Pope gripped the throttles and gunned the engines, trying to milk as much power as possible from the straining props. Shrapnel slammed into the obsolete aircraft. Pope swore. The gunners on the ground were getting the range.

An explosion under his right wing rocked the aircraft and tipped it dangerously to the left. Pope jockeyed the yoke and gently pressured the rudder pedals. But it was too late. His right wing tip was a mass of flame and black smoke trailed behind. He had to bail out and fast. He reached for the hatch overhead. Already, the B-26 was reacting sluggishly. He pulled himself through the cockpit hatch, locked his hands on his chest and plunged into nothingness. Below was Indonesia.

He yanked the ripcord on his chest and moments later the canopy cracked open and ballooned above him. Tracers from the ground sizzled in his direction. Pope grasped the risers and began swaying like a pendulum in an effort to avoid the aim of the machine gunners on the ground. Fortunately, they were poor

Air America Crewman carries children off plane after
Approved For Release 2009/07/02 : CIA-RDP2009B00300130004-7

COPYRIGHT



MAR 1966

Approved For Release 2009/07/02 : CIA-RDP2009B00300130004-7

marksmen. He braced himself for the landing, splashing into a small coral reef from which a few scraggly coconut palms poked from the water.

His chute was blown against one of the palms by a stiff breeze. He arched high, like a rock tied to a string. His body swung fast as the chute caught in the palm fronds and like a man on a swing, he felt himself falling toward the thick tree trunk. He braced both legs to break the impact but misjudged. His legs struck the tree and he gasped in pain, not hearing the crack of bone breaking in his right leg.

Automatically, Pope punched the harness release; he dropped six feet to the circle of soft damp ground at the base of the tree and lay there as excruciating pain shot through his broken leg. He was unable to move and that's how Indonesian Army troops found him on May 18, 1958.

Allen Lawrence Pope became a prisoner of /CO
Indonesia and kicked off an international uproar
that has since sparked interest in the "business
ventures" of the Central Intelligence Agency. Pope, a U.S.
Air Force combat pilot during the Korean War, had been
hired by a C.I.A. front organization that is still operating
today flying arms and agents behind the front lines of the
many secret wars that are presently raging in the far corners
of the globe.

Part of this saga actually began 11 years ago when France contracted with a virtually unknown American air charter line to help fly supplies to Indochina or what is now known as Vietnam. The charter line, in turn, signed up a private employment agency in Teterboro, N.J., to screen possible

pilots who were willing to risk their necks for \$25,000 a year. The agency, called Pilots Employment Agency, placed a few small "help wanted" advertisements in newspapers and was amazed at the number of replies.

"The phone hasn't stopped ringing," Edward Binder, the 34-year-old director of the employment agency reported at the time. "Bankers, doctors, lawyers, Chinese pilots, Canadian pilots, Luftwaffe pilots, guys who want the money, guys who hate the Reds, guys who fought on both sides of a dozen wars—even an ordained minister. We've got enough volunteer pilots to set up a private air force."

Before he knew it Binder had the makings of a dozen combat air forces in his files. Flight engineers and ground crew mechanics began signing up. A number of men even indicated they were not averse to seeing a little combat "if it paid."

Within a year some of the men who had signed up with the specialized agency located on the third floor of the Teterboro Airport building were flying creaky W.W. II relics in Indonesia and other areas of Southeast Asia. Some were even sure they were really sticking their necks out—in

On the third floor of the Peterboro Airport hanger building were flying creaky W.W. II relics in Indo-china and other areas of Southeast Asia. Some were even flying where they were really sticking their necks out—in the direction of the Iron and Bamboo Curtains.

Behind these flights to strategic areas that military men consider "enemy territory" is a mysterious organization called Air America. A check with the Federal Aviation Agency discloses the names of the officers of this corporation, but little else is known about them. They are not known to the men who operate the nation's scheduled and non-scheduled airlines. Air America's corporate address is a post office box in Wash-

ington, D.C.

Actually, the set-up is reminiscent of a commercial establishment set up on Formosa by the C.I.A. in 1951 called Western Enterprises, Incorporated. Western Enterprises was given the assignment of directing Nationalist Chinese commando raids against the Red mainland. Included in these raids were aerial supply and agent drops which required the use of aircraft. In the late 1940's the U.S. Government decided to give a huge amount of W.W. II surplus equipment including a number of transports and

combat aircraft. A few far-reaching officials in C.I.A. like Richard Bissell, co-Approved For Release 2002/12/02 CIA DPLT300001R00030010004-7 Richard Bissell, co-Approved For Release 2002/12/02 CIA DPLT300001R00030010004-7

that before any surplus is placed on sale, "C.I.A. wants a crack at it."

The lists of military weapons, equipment and aircraft that were to be sold were turned over to the intelligence people. Quietly, huge shipments were pulled off the inventory list and secretly placed in warehouses marked with "Reserved" tags. Among the mass of trucks, tanks, armored cars, radio and communications equipment and a host of other items associated only with war, were 500 brand new, unused aircraft that included fighters, bombers and transports. Bissell and his boss, Allen Dulles, were convinced that the world was headed for a period of small shooting wars and revolutions that would require intercession by the C.I.A. Moreover, they reasoned, if stocks of military equipment were on hand—where C.I.A. could immediately lay their hands on them and ship them anywhere in the world—the response by the U.S. to trouble overseas could be immediate.

Few Americans realized it at the time, a little more than 15 years ago, but a number of secret wars were then in the making. Today, spurred on by Communist aggression in South Vietnam, the United States is now waging a new kind of undercover warfare around the world, using 25,000 skilled Americans—including many fliers—and spending \$2 billion a year.

This elite "secret army" is today carrying on counterinsurgency operations in 50 nations in an effort to halt Red subversion before it reaches the Vietnam stage. Riots in Panama, arms smuggling in Venezuela and Communist infiltration in Chile all have been met—without publicity—by American counterinsurgency experts who were flown to the trouble spots

by the mysterious airline called Air America.

In some quarters Air America is considered even more mysterious an operation than the Select 3000 strategy council composed of some of the highest government officials in Washington who make up the Special Group for Counterinsurgency. The activities of this group, until recently, were so secret that even the existence of such an organization was unknown except at the highest levels of government. Success of the "secret army" has been so striking in some places that a bitter debate has broken out over who shall control the operation. Smack in the middle is Air America, the transport arm for Uncle Sam's undercover operations.

Involved in these operations are four groups which provide the bulk of counterinsurgency forces—the C.I.A., Army, Air Force and State Department. However, they can only go up to a certain point because the men who fly the aircraft are the people who are important in helping to carry out the actual secret missions.

The problem of using a front organization actually came up during the Korean War. Although the United States was directly at war with Communist China, this fact was clouded by the fiction of international relations and high level diplomacy. First, the U.S. was acting as agent for the United Nations and, therefore, was not directly at war with Red China. Second, Red China was using "volunteers" and therefore was not directly engaged in war with either the U.S. or the U.N.

Meanwhile, both sides were slugging it out along the 150 mile long front that divided the mountainous peninsula. Strategy dictated that something be done behind "enemy" lines and, C.I.A. concluded, where it would hurt most. The target was Red China itself.

(Continued on page 56)

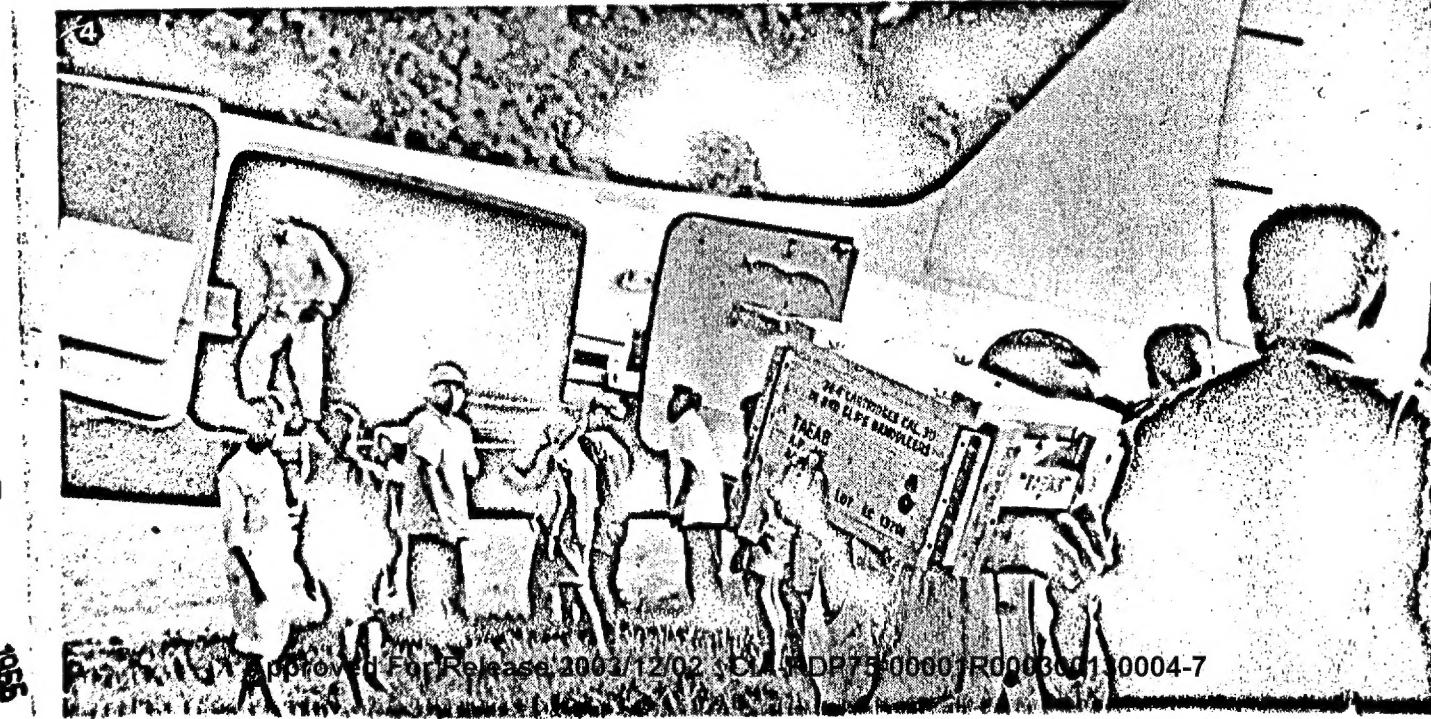
CPYRGH

① Allan L. Pope got long jail term for his anti-Sukarno activities in Indonesia.

② Former head of CIA, Allen Dulles, was one of the masterminds behind Air America.

③ John Thomas Downey was taken prisoner by Red Chinese after CIA mission had failed.

④ Other activities of Air America includes supplying anti-Reds around the world.



AIR AMERICA - THE CIA'S SECRET AIR FORCE

Western Enterprises, Inc. was set up to handle this secret operation which was directed by a former W.W. II resistance fighter with a heavy German accent by the name of Frank Bender (who later would be deeply involved in the Bay of Pigs invasion fiasco). In order to deliver agents and supplies to anti-Communist resistance groups inside Red China, Bender utilized the personnel of Civil Air Transport, the famed C.A.T. airline built up by former "Flying Tiger" commander, Gen. Claire Chennault. As it would be considered bad diplomatic manners to fly civilian aircraft into Red China, C.A.T. flying personnel would have to use unmarked aircraft. C.I.A. had 500 such planes available.

I recall visiting K-16 airbase outside of Seoul, Korea, one afternoon. As I drove down one end of the massive military field, I couldn't help but notice the 10 silvery unmarked C-46 Commandos lined up. A few of them wore their badges of services, patches of aluminum where enemy ground fire had slammed into wings and fuselage. At the time, many of the war correspondents like myself were under the impression that these aircraft were engaged in flying secret missions into North Korea. We all knew about the supersecret United Nations Partisan Forces in Korea (U.N.P.F.K.) engaged in guerrilla fighting behind Communist lines, but none of us ever suspected that undercover intelligence operations against Red China were being conducted from Korea.

On November 11, 1952, an innocuous press release from U.N. Command Headquarters announced that a transport plane flying between Seoul, Korea, and Tachikawa Air Base outside of Tokyo, Japan, was missing and presumed to have gone down with all aboard. The type of aircraft was not mentioned and the story made a small paragraph in the stateside newspaper that ran it.

Two years later, on November 23, 1954, Peking Radio broadcast an announcement about the capture of two Americans, John Thomas Downey and Richard George Fecteau on November 11, 1952. The broadcast reported how Downey, "alias Jack Donovan," and his colleague, Fecteau, "were special agents of the Central Intelligence Agency, a United States espionage organization." They were charged with having helped to organize and train two teams of Chinese agents. The men, Peking announced, had been air-dropped into Kirin and Liaoning Provinces for "subversive activities," and both Downey and Fecteau were captured when their plane was downed as they attempted to parachute supplies and contact agents inside Red China. Peking reported that nine Chinese were also captured.

Downey was sentenced to life. Fecteau got 20 years.

The broadcast also stated that 106 U.S. and Chinese agents had been parachuted into Red China between 1951 and 1954—and killed—while 124 others had been captured. "These running dogs of capitalism," the radio report declared, "were trained in secret codes, invisible writing,

secret messages, telephone tapping, forging documents, psychological warfare, guerrilla tactics and demolition."

The U.S. replied that Downey and Fecteau were civilian employees of the U.S. Army and passengers on a routine transport flight between Korea and Japan. What wasn't explained was how an aircraft flying a southeasterly direction could wind up due west of Korea which is the Communist Chinese mainland.

In Korea, meanwhile, the war correspondents made their periodic visits to K-16 either to return to Japan for rest and recreation, fly to the front or interview incoming dignitaries from the States. Each time the route through K-16 was the same. The road took us along the far corner of the air base where the silent unmarked twin-engine transports sat. Only, instead of the original 10 their numbers had dwindled to seven, then six and then five shot-up C-46's. Suddenly, we noticed that once again there were 10 of these aircraft and each one was brand new.

Newsmen get around, even to the officers' clubs and other so-called bistros in Seoul that passed for nightspots. The civilian complement in Seoul was small. We knew who the diplomats were, the traders and the war relief workers. One day a few men suddenly appeared on the scene wearing sky blue uniforms and caps with civilian airline markings identified by the winged insignia and letters of C.A.T.

"Opening a new route to Seoul?" a correspondent asked one of the Americans wearing the Civil Air Transport uniform. He shook his head. "Just passing through on a special flight," he replied.

How special it was we didn't know at the time.

Early in 1954 I was assigned to cover the fighting in Indochina between France and the Communist Viet Minh led by North Vietnam's present military chief General Giap and Prime Minister Ho Chi Minh. Eleven years ago, however, this army battling the French Foreign Legionnaires was nothing but a motley guerrilla organization which, according to French generals I interviewed, "just couldn't win." Unfortunately, the French were faced with a serious problem. Supplies for their Legion outposts—patterned after the desert outposts and forts of North Africa—could only be delivered by aircraft. France didn't have enough transports in its small air force. Orders were issued in Paris to hire pilots and rent aircraft.

It was at this point that Air America got into the act. Pilots and air crews were hired to air-supply the French units in the field. What the French didn't know was that the men who worked for Air America also had other—and more secret—missions.

The pilots and air crews were a close-mouthed group. They worked under various aliases but it was obvious that some of them were Australian, British, Canadian, German and other nationalities. Of course, there were a large number of Americans included. Wearing all types of clothing, but packing pistols in shoulder holsters or sagging from belt holsters, they'd be seen at various air fields in Indochina working on their aircraft. The trucks would pull up and parachute packed equipment would be loaded aboard. It was all above board. The aircraft were flying supplies to the French troops in Indochina.

That is, most of the aircraft were

ing supplies. A few others, though, were flying entirely different missions. In 1954 there were no separate nations called Cambodia or Laos. These were virtual provinces within the Indochinese colony that France had owned for nearly a century. Moreover, it was just a direct flight from the airstrip at Hanoi or the one at the port city of Haiphong, now within Communist North Vietnam, along the 21st parallel to Burma. Inside Burma was a 25,000 man anti-Communist Chinese army in the pay of the C.I.A.

At night trucks would rumble onto the airfield and be driven directly to the planes. Guards would hop to the ground and untie the canvas sealing at the rear of the vehicles. Boxes of guns, ammunition and food would be loaded on the transports and they would then take off—in the direction of Burma. The neutralist government of Burma protested to the United States. Unfortunately, the protest was made officially to the right man—the U.S. ambassador—but he turned out to be the wrong man to stop the supply flights.

Ambassador William J. Sebald, an old Far East hand whose brother-in-law, Maj. Gen. Charles A. Willoughby was for many years the intelligence chief to Gen. Douglas MacArthur, denied any knowledge of the supply flights or of the anti-Communist army in the Burmese jungle. However, at a diplomatic gathering Sebald was confronted by Gen. Ne Win, Burmese Army chief, who angrily demanded that the U.S. stop supplying the Nationalist Chinese troops.

"General," the ambassador answered. "I can honestly say that my government has nothing to do with these troops." Sebald had communicated with the State Department and was told that Uncle Sam was not supporting a secret army in Burma. As it turned out, even the State Department had no inkling what the C.I.A. was up to.

"Mr. Ambassador," the Burmese general coldly replied, "you're a liar. I have it cold. If I were you, I'd just keep quiet." With that sharp answer, the Burmese general turned on his heel and walked away.

Meanwhile, from the wide-open air fields in French-held North Indochina the C-46 transports—and a few W.W. II B-24 bombers—continuously made flights to Burma and secretly parachuted supplies to the anti-Communist troops in the jungle. Then one day in 1961 a few Americans in what had now become South Vietnam watched an ancient relic touch down at Bien Hoa air base which was staffed by the U.S. Air Force. The airmen and officers stared at the multi-engine bomber as it glided in and rumbled along the runway, taxiing to a halt. It was a B-24 Liberator. Painted jet black, the "ugly duckling" of W.W. II was directed to a corner of the U.S. air base and men dropped down from the belly hatches. They took up positions around the plane, submachine guns at the ready. A jeep drove up and the U.S. officer and a civilian known to the airmen as a technical representative from the U.S. aircraft company that manufactured B-26 bombers spoke to the Liberator's crew.

The Air Force officer was the base intelligence officer. The civilian, as it turned out, was a C.I.A. representative stationed at Bien Hoa just in case such an incident should occur. The B-24 had taken off from Formosa and on the way had developed mechanical trouble. The plane had to land at Bien Hoa.

That night the base was buzzing. The old-timers among the airmen couldn't stop talking about the Liberator. They just couldn't believe that one of the old relics actually existed, let alone was being used. They would have been even more surprised if they could have seen the four-engine bomber's cargo. The B-24 crew worked over their plane that night and early the next morning the Liberator took off and turned in the direction of Cambodia. It all had been very hush-hush. Nobody had gotten the opportunity to speak with the crew other than the Bien Hoa intelligence officer and the so-called "tech rep." On the other hand, the Liberator's crew had made a couple of phone calls for assorted parts. They were Americans.

Actually, there was more talk about the B-24 than its mysterious crew. All sorts of "static" buzzed around the base concerning the aircraft. Then, the Liberator took off.

The four-engine bomber crossed Cambodia and then flew over Thailand, turning northward in the direction of Burma. A flight of Burmese Air Force fighters, also of W.W. II vintage, spotted the black aircraft. The flight leader checked his briefing sheet. It said nothing about the possibility of any aircraft being in his patrol sector. The flight leader wagged his wings and the six fighters dived toward the bomber.

The Liberator's pilot tried to evade the attacking aircraft. It was useless. The fighters made one pass and shot up the B-24 badly, knocking out one engine. A second pass and the lumbering four-engine bomber burst into flame. Members of the crew bailed out and drifted toward the jungle as the men aboard the Libera-

tor expertly dropped on long free-fall flights before they cracked the canopy of their chutes all of 200 feet above the trees. The B-24 slammed into the mass of jungle and exploded.

Gen. Ne Win ordered an army patrol to the area to investigate the crash. No bodies were discovered, only the liberator's twisted wreckage. Rifles, machine guns, mortars and five tons of ammunition were found in crates among the wreckage of the B-24. The weapons and ammo were all American made and the data on the crates indicated that the equipment had been "sold" as surplus to an organization called Western Enterprises, Inc. of Taipah, Formosa.

For years the unmarked aircraft on mysterious flights had more or less flown unhampered and unmolested throughout Asia. However, the new countries of the world, following a pattern set by some of the richer emerging nations, began organizing their own national air lines. Treaties were signed and these new countries agreed to follow established international air transportation regulations. These rules dictate the status of all aircraft, including their markings. Air America, which had been operating in Southeast Asia and in Africa, soon discovered that it could no longer fly unmarked planes. Moreover, the unmarked aircraft that once was barely recognized as anything more than an airplane by the natives, soon stood out like a sore thumb. The natives took pride in the fact they could read names and commercial insignias on aircraft. After all, wasn't this part of being civilized? The officials of Air America decided to overcome curiosity; they painted their aircraft with the name of their company.

The routine flights today will find pilots of every nationality at the controls of the twin-engine C-46's, C-47's and C-54's that were long ago declared surplus by the Pentagon. The pilots know who they're working for and therefore prefer not to talk about their jobs. Nobody risks losing more than \$25,000 a year plus living expenses by talking out of turn.

A typical Air America flight today originates in Saigon. The transport takes off and slowly turns in any number of directions to one of the scattered American military bases in South Vietnam. The pilot radios in and is given his landing clearance instructions. The lumbering transport touches down and rolls to a halt with engines slowly turning over. A jeep with a "Follow Me" sign on its rear speeds toward the transport and then takes over, leading the aircraft to a quiet but heavily guarded corner of the field. A few trucks are parked alongside a pair of quonset huts. Two American Special Forces types step from the air conditioned hut and call out to somebody in the canvas covered vehicles. Quickly men jump out; dark, swarthy, tough looking Vietnamese wearing coveralls and lugging parachutes. They run the few steps that it takes to reach the aircraft and clamber up the ladder to the passenger area.

Meanwhile, other Vietnamese work on the other side of the aircraft loading special containers to which parachutes are fixed. Within half an hour the Air America transport is ready to take off again. The sun is setting and the pilot is anxious to be airborne again. He taxis the aircraft to the strip and is given clearance. He guns the engines and the transport slowly rumbles down the runway, lifts off the

ground, tops the high trees at the end of the strip and slowly turns northward.

Aboard the transport the Vietnamese put on their chutes with the aid of the Special Forces men who are similarly harnessed with the exception that they are in uniform. The Vietnamese are silent. Some sit staring off into space. Others check their gear. The civilian loadmaster aboard the transport checks his cargo to be certain that the parachutes attached to the cannisters are properly hooked up.

It's quite apparent what is going on. To the experienced Far East hand, this is a scene that has repeated itself for years. The two Special Forces GI's and the crew of the transport are on an agent drop. Target: somewhere *inside* North Vietnam well north of the 17th Parallel that divides the heavily bombed north from the guerrilla warfare ravaged south.

For more than two hours the transport flies north. There are no wingtip and body lights winking in the night as there would be on a transport flying a regular route. The Vietnamese agents peek from the fuselage windows at the engines. They see no exhaust flames as there would normally be on any other aircraft but an Air American transport. A special muffler covers the exhaust pipes.

The navigator steps up to the pilot's compartment from his niche just behind. He passes to the copilot a small clipboard.

with a map enlargement. A note is scribbled on the bottom advising the copilot that the drop zone is about 10 minutes away and that he should hold to his course. The copilot nods. He knows that in 10 minutes there will be a signal from the ground that will appear as nothing more than a blip on a special scope. The territory where the D.Z. is located may be primitive, but nighttime spy drops are quite sophisticated. No longer are there special fires on the ground in the form of an X or Y or just a two, three or four-fire signal. Nor are coded flashlight or lantern signals used.

Today the emphasis on secret communications is spelled out and wrapped up in the term "electronics." A tiny battery-operated transmitter, sending out a low frequency signal that can be picked up only by a similar device in the aircraft, beats out the word that the transport was rapidly approaching the D.Z.

The pilot reaches out and jabs the warning button. A red light blinks in the passenger compartment. The Special Forces team alerts the agents and checks their parachutes. The loadmaster shoves open the door in the fuselage.

The transport slowly circles over the D.Z. One of the Special Forces men nods to the loadmaster. He signals the pilot that all is ready. A green light winks on. The South Vietnamese agents step out into blackness and the loadmaster, aided by the two Special Forces GI's, shoves out the cannisters carrying radio equipment, weapons and ammunition. When the men are all out the loadmaster buttons up the side hatch and the transport turns south in the direction of Saigon.

Shortly after midnight the transport is back on the ground in Saigon. The air crew is sitting in a South Vietnamese night spot taking in the local color, the curvaceous Annamite beauties who regularly frequent the gaily lit saloons. The mission is over and done with. It had been one of many, some of which had been flown even to off-limits Laos and Cambodia—and beyond.

They are flights that the members of Air America are reluctant to discuss with any stranger, much less among themselves. After all, why jeopardize \$25,000 a year? That's what one airline pays its men to fly where others fear to venture. It's all part of the secret war that's constantly being waged throughout the world; a war that requires pilots and air crews who are willing to take a chance that will pay off handsomely if they return or mean imprisonment or death if they don't.

A lot of men are taking this chance partly for the handsome pay and partly for the satisfaction of knowing that they're helping to beat the Reds at a deadly game that the Commies thought they had down pat.

END